

The Courage to Ask and the Humility to Listen: Hermeneutics between Philosophy and Theology

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Hermeneutics promotes an awareness of the interpretive character of the world. With regard to the difficult and complex relationship between philosophy and theology, hermeneutics calls for critical rethinking of the Heideggerian postulate to exclude theology from philosophy on the grounds of the autonomy of philosophy, and to exclude philosophy from theology on Barthian revelational positivist grounds. Heidegger's philosophy has a long history of being interpreted as an invitation to theology to think about God and religion in a new, non metaphysical way. Re-examining the question of the meaning of Being, Heidegger inspired a search for new paths of thinking God outside the established onto-theological tradition. I will argue that both exclusions—philosophy from theology, theology from philosophy—are hermeneutically untenable.

After Gadamer and Ricoeur, it became obvious that neither a simple methodological division between the disciplines nor their total separation was sustainable. Hermeneutics calls for the possibility of a productive interaction between philosophy and theology while maintaining their respective integrity. An interactive relationship between philosophy and theology allows for their mutual enrichment in a hermeneutically redesigned horizon of new proximity of the disciplines.¹ Theology can be illumined by philosophy, and philosophy by theology, without suppressing the inescapable tension between them. A Levinasian hermeneutics of reciprocal relationship allows for a mutual critique of philosophical and theological positions, and can have a powerful role in informing the work of the philosopher and theologian alike. For understanding the relationship between philosophy and theology, the two need to be perceived as equal yet different. Looking at the much troubled relationship between those two disciplines, at a long history of despicable falls, but also strange and successful recoveries, we can hope for hermeneutic insight in the age of the

¹ Here the proximity is understood in the Levinasian sense: "Proximity appears as the relationship with the other, who cannot be resolved into „images“ or be exposed in a theme." Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 100.

return of the religious. Hermeneutics calls us not only to negotiate the space between the disciplines but also to re-think the reasonability of translating the unique discourse of one discipline into the language of the other. It shows us that the confinement of language to one theoretical idiom can stifle the quest for that which cannot be fully articulated. This hermeneutic insight is based on Heidegger's understanding of the formal meaning of phenomenology as letting "that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself."²

The French turn toward the theological has been perceived, particularly by Dominique Janicaud, as philosophically inconsistent, problematizing the phenomenology of the absolute as a transgression of phenomenological method in favor of predominantly theological concerns. Janicaud's call for maintaining phenomenology within clearly defined and assumed methodological limits, without losing sight of the ideal and constraints of scientificity, emphatically favors strong boundaries between philosophy and theology as autonomous and mutually exclusive disciplines. Janicaud provokes a critical dialogue with the inclusive approach to the relationship between philosophy and theology, which, on the theological site, flourished with a polyphonic concept of "the worshipping self, before the face of Christ and other people, in an „economy of superabundance.“"³ Hermeneutically, phenomenology problematized the Husserlian ideal of scientificity long before the theological turn occurred. If life is already interpreted before it is disclosed to phenomenology, there would seem to be no way of excluding theology as a possible interpretant.

In Search of a Universal Language

The „between“ is a hermeneutic category, which allows for the critical engagement of philosophy and theology in their relationship to each other.⁴ Both disciplines unapologetically demonstrate their respective and conflictual commitments in showing that faith and reason are not simply opposed. The emancipatory potential of Christian theology and the return of the religious in contemporary philosophy challenge the understanding of the very meaning of theology and philosophy and their reciprocal relationship. Hermeneutics exists „between“ philosophy and theology because it is its nature to mediate conflictual discourses.

For Ricoeur, "in front of the court, the plurivocity common to texts and actions is exhibited in the form of a conflict of interpretations, and the final interpretation appears as a verdict to which it is possible to make appeal."⁵ Thus, philosophy is a critical reflection on the cultural signs and symbols, which need to be

² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1962), 58.

³ David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁴ Nicholas Davey, *Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY, 2006).

⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, trans. Kathleen Blamer and John B. Thompson (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 162.

interpreted by deciphering the narrative of human existence in its particularity. The unveiling of reality needs to negotiate ideological distortion. As an endless task of interpretation, hermeneutics always happens within the dynamic of revealing/concealing. Since one of the tasks of philosophy is to assist people in their struggle to make sense of their life, it will unavoidably face contradictions in interpretations. The mission of philosophy will remain to arbitrate between conflicting discourses, while taking into account the coexistence of often contradicting interpretations without either dismissing them or idealizing the possibility of complete understanding. Understanding will always remain fragmentary if it does not attempt to silence the provisional character of any interpretation.

To understand the complexity of Freud's psychoanalysis, Ricoeur refers to two types of hermeneutics. Freud was usually associated with analytic hermeneutics, which is by nature regressive and demystifying. However, Ricoeur complements this reductive reading of Freud by speaking of his synthetic hermeneutics, which is progressive and revelatory. By reading Freud along with the masters of suspicion, Nietzsche and Marx, Ricoeur concentrates on Freud's demystification by showing the centrality of his interpretation of signifiers.⁶

Ricoeur applies his basic hermeneutic framework to Freud's psychoanalysis as the mode of understanding and arbitrating the claims of making sense of human life. His understanding of psychoanalysis as a type of textual interpretation offers a critical correction to Freud's claim regarding the universality of psychoanalysis. Ricoeur's reading of Freud's interpretation of the Oedipus complex invites hermeneutics to reveal the complexity of understanding human being, while acknowledging the impact of psychoanalysis on the uncovering the truth about the *conditio humana*. This exemplary reading of Freud clarifies the possible role of hermeneutics in the relationship between philosophy and theology. Ricoeur's interpretation of Freud does not aim at imposing his own reading of the Oedipus complex. On the contrary, Ricoeur shows, with great consistency, that Freud's reading is incomplete, not incorrect. In fact, following Heidegger's understanding that untruth or concealment is inherent to the nature of truth itself and that there can be no disclosure without concealment, Ricoeur stresses the complementarity of "the two readings in the unity of the symbol in its power to disguise and reveal."⁷ The hermeneutic contribution to the understanding of our human condition is its thematization of the historicity of the Dasein that we are. Thus hermeneutics raises questions about the understanding of the human condition, which need to be addressed in the context of an unstable equilibrium or subtle conflict between different approaches to the human being.

Understanding psychoanalysis as a hermeneutics of suspicion, Ricoeur advocates sensitivity to the deception in language. With reference to the notion of

⁶ On the Freudian interpretation of signifiers, see Jerrold R. Brandell, *Narration and Therapeutic Action: The Construction of Meaning in Psychoanalytic Social Work* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1970), 517.

Verstellung, which combines the two universes of discourse and expresses the fusion of these two concepts, Ricoeur clearly shows that a disguise is a type of manifestation and, at the same time, a distortion that alters that manifestation. Therefore, it is the *violence done to the meaning*. The task of an interpreter is to compromise the tension within the relation of the hidden to that which is shown in the shown in the disguise.⁸ The analyst searches for meaning beyond what is obvious and common. Since psychoanalysis is concerned with the interpretation of a patient's language, it has to take into account the polyvocal nature of language. In fact, the understanding of an encountered problem is not an achievement of the analyst nor the patient, but an advancement toward the grasping of the problem (*die Sache*) that needs to be understood. Therefore, the interpretative powers of the patient and the therapist are essential to the success of the psychoanalytic treatment.

Ricoeur's reading of Freud emphasizes the importance of hermeneutics for both philosophy and psychoanalysis. On the one hand, it is a question of arbitrating between the hermeneutics of suspicion and the hermeneutics of sympathy. On the other hand, it initiates the process of integrating interpretations into the whole philosophical enterprise. Ricoeur stresses the importance of the symbol. Accepting the anti-phenomenological character of psychoanalysis, Ricoeur shows that symbols can be read both backwards (reductively) and forwards (phenomenologically). The validity of both readings is grounded in the overdetermination of the symbol. By showing the manner in which Freud works backwards in revealing the regressive aspect of human behavior, searching for and pointing to primordial meanings, Ricoeur emphasizes the convergence of conflictual discourses and the conflictual nature of existence in the tendency of the „I“ to close a circle within itself. Following Lacan, Ricoeur shows how condensation (metaphor) and displacement (metonymy) reveal the mixture of different discourses.

Based on the inherent plurivocity of meaning, which symbols demonstrate in their overdetermined semantic texture, Ricoeur formulates the hermeneutic task: an interpretation that develops the intentionality of multiple meaning in symbols. This dialectic task is a patient progress toward understanding. Starting with the interpretation of the meaning of the psychoanalytical statements with respect to their validity and limits, Ricoeur elaborates the place of analytic experience in the total field of human experience. Examining an archeology of the subject, Ricoeur points toward the interdependence of analytic disciplines, which can be applied to the relationship between philosophy and theology. The concept of the subject secures a philosophical ground for analytic discourse. On the other hand, theology, aware of the discourse of its own archeology, becomes a concrete reflection and thus overcomes the danger of abstraction.

⁸ Ibid., 92.

What is essential in a hermeneutic relationship between philosophy and theology is their situatedness in a horizon of complementary opposition. Hermeneutics dialectically relates regression and progression as two possible directions of interpretation, opposed but complementary.⁹ The task of hermeneutics is not so much the overcoming or reconciling of opposed interpretations. As with Ricoeur's conflict between a hermeneutics that demystifies religion and a hermeneutics that tries to grasp, in the symbols of faith, a possible kerygma, the task is not to offer a solution to the conflict, but to articulate the tension between the conflictual discourses and disclose naive expectations for a solution to a hermeneutic conflict.¹⁰ It is precisely the hermeneutic reflection, and specifically, the hermeneutics of the symbol, which provides the structure for handling any hermeneutic conflict. The main characteristics of the hermeneutic reflection is its concretion, which is achieved in the movement of interpretation. This movement fuses together its essential necessity and the contingency of the cultural signs and symbols through which it recognizes itself.

Ricoeur's hermeneutics is a great reminder that neither theology nor philosophy speaks with a single voice. In fact, the polysemic nature of philosophical discourse, or maybe even a certain "confusion of voices" is ultimately necessary to elucidate that which needs to be understood by the finite human being. Following Ricoeur's treatment of philosophy and psychoanalysis, we can see the radicality of a hermeneutics situated between philosophy and theology in a transcendental logic of double meaning established on the level of the conditions of possibility. Ricoeur's task to arbitrate the discordance between a definition that is too „long“ and a definition that is too „short,“ leads to a delimitation of the field of application

⁹ "The challenge comes not only from without, it is not only the voice of the „intolerant“ logician; it comes from within, from the internal inconsistency of hermeneutics, torn by contradiction. As we already know, not one but several interpretations have to be integrated into reflection. Thus the hermeneutic conflict itself is what nourishes the process of reflection and governs the movement from abstract to concrete reflection. Is this possible without „destroying“ reflection?" Ibid., 54.

¹⁰ "In giving precedence to the problem of method, we reduce the entire symbolism of evil to the rank of an example. We shall not regret doing so: one of the results of reflection will be precisely that the symbolism of evil is not one example out of many but a privileged example, perhaps even the native land of all symbolism, the birthplace of the hermeneutic conflict taken in its full extent. But this we shall understand only through the movement of reflection, a reflection that at first knows the symbols of evil merely as a given or arbitrarily chosen example." Ibid., 40.

of the concept of symbol by reference to the act of interpretation. He further stresses that it is the linguistic expression, which lends itself by its double or multiple meanings to a work of interpretation. For Ricoeur, what gives rise to this interpretive task is an intentional structure which consists not in the relation of meaning to thing but in an architecture of meaning. This architecture is a complex project, which calls for a thematization of the relationship of meaning to meaning, of second meaning to first meaning in the full spectrum of possible constellations. What is essential is to understand that it is this texture what makes interpretation possible, however, the visibility of this texture, the whole architecture of meaning is made evident only by doing hermeneutics, in the actual movement of interpretation.¹¹ As for Ricoeur, the transcendental logic of double meaning is complex but not arbitrary, rigorous in its articulations but irreducible to the linearity of symbolic logic. With Ricoeur we can advocate a logic that is not built upon the conditions of objectivity of nature but the „objectivity“ of human desire, a logic, which is no longer formal, but transcendental.¹²

The semantic structure of symbols reveals an overdetermination of meaning. The task of interpretation cannot be reduced to the prevention of overlapping the respective fields of application. However, in symbolic narration we deal with an excess of meaning over which we have little command. The symbol in its density of manifold meaning gives rise to thought. What inspires the relationship between philosophy and theology, particularly for seeing hermeneutics as situated between those different modes of thinking, is the hermeneutic insight that interpretation consists less in suppressing ambiguity than in understanding and in explicating the richness of the traditions that we are.

With Ricoeur we can emphasize the richness of hermeneutic symbolism and oppose it to the emptiness of the logical symbolism. As Ricoeur plays with the poetics of the symbol by emphasizing the apparent opposition between the way symbols bind us and give thought content and density, he builds up the argument for the hermeneutic realm of double meaning in the horizon of ambiguity (equivocity of words and amphiboly of statements). In the battle with the artificiality and emptiness of logical

¹¹ Ibid., 18.

¹² Charles W. Allen, “The Primacy of „Phronesis“: A Proposal for Avoiding Frustrating Tendencies in Our Conceptions of Rationality,” *The Journal of Religion* 69, no. 3 (July, 1989): 359-374.

symbolism, hermeneutics is forced to radically justify its own *raison d'être* by exposing the ambiguity of arguments, based not on the ideological compromise but on the internal symbolic structure of the matter itself. Since theological symbols can also be read reductively or phenomenologically, we face the irreconcilability of philosophical and theological discourses.

Our task is not to quell the differences between these two irreconcilable discourses, but rather to call for the most extreme oppositional readings. Therefore, hermeneutics can serve as a site for addressing the questions that are relevant for both disciplines. It is not an attempt to water down the distinction between the disciplines, but to exacerbate it. Where understanding breaks down, there hermeneutics begins. This is not a license for chaos, but an invitation to enter into a horizon where dialogue can occur. Philosophy and theology must be free to be themselves, without being translated into each other.

Ricoeur's "hermeneutics of suspicion" reveals and conceals something about the nature of Being. By reflecting upon the hermeneutic relevance of Freudian psychoanalysis, Ricoeur notes that Freud does not speak of a „science“ of dreams but of the “interpretation” of dreams.¹³ For both Freud and Ricoeur, language itself is refracted; it means something other than what it says. The equivocal nature of language points toward a double meaning. The productivity of interpretation is based on the hermeneutic situation where another meaning is both given and hidden in an immediate meaning. As with the interpretation of dreams, we could say that the main task of faith is interpretation, a task which has clear existential repercussions, i.e., not the science of faith in the sense of a system, e.g., “the system of Catholicism” with which the young Heidegger broke. The task of interpretation is to explicate the ontological tensions inherent in human existence. It deciphers the ambiguity of belonging through freedom of the will to both the natural world and the world of action. To understand something that has been said to somebody about something means to engage different perspectives on ourselves, to formulate diverse approaches and methods in understanding ourselves by mapping out the intersections of the

¹³ “The term *Deutung* does not mean science in a general way; it means interpretation in a precise way. The word is chosen by design, and its juxtaposition with the theme of dreams is itself quite meaningful. If dreams designate—*pars pro toto*—the entire region of double-meaning expressions, the problem of interpretation in turn designates all understanding specifically concerned with the meaning of equivocal expressions. To interpret is to understand a double meaning.” Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 8.

various irreducible horizons of our understanding of that which needs to be understood. Following Ricoeur, understanding ourselves means realizing what he calls “fault lines,” the tensions that run through the very structure of human being. Hermeneutics invites us to accept the discontinuity, ruptures, and gaps in the discourse on human nature, which by intersecting in different ways give rise to numerous, different and irreducible meanings. This instability is a creative power that gives meaning to our lives. Poetics, rather than philosophy, responds to the mysteries of human experience and the speculative aporias of time.

Thinking Imprisoned: A Captive Mind Tortured by the Demands of the Technological Age

Hermeneutics is an invitation to dialogue in a common truth. It is a conversation in the spirit of generosity and intellectual integrity, charity and care for the different or even contradictory interpretations and compassion for understanding that which seeks to be understood. Hermeneutics is distinctly personal. The validity of interpretation is tested by life. It is not an expression of the thirst for power and profit but a search for a deeper understanding of the need for individual change in our life. As a symbol of difference, hermeneutics forecloses the *viam brevem*. Hermeneutics is the recognition of dignity, respect, and courage to interpret, a protest against violence and calculation. Hermeneutics situates thinking in the horizon of unlimited possibilities of interpretation with the deep conviction that there is an intrinsic value in thinking and that every thought is worthy of being entertained. As such, hermeneutics places itself in service of those voices that are suppressed and denied expression. Hermeneutic virtue is the courage to remain in the realm of the unknown and strange, while sojourning toward self-understanding. It is the welcoming gesture toward the uncomfortable and demanding realities of life in a dialectical interplay of question and answer. Hermeneutics remains on the threshold of the promised land of understanding, permanently without the security of arriving at a satisfactory interpretation, yet without becoming a victim of arbitrariness. Hermeneutics is the struggle to situate life not in methodological security, but rather within the horizon of creative insecurity and incompleteness.

Heidegger’s emphasis on language marked the hermeneutic turn in philosophy: to think a concept, it is necessary to think the history of the concept, and the history of the concept is implicit in the language which

expresses it. Thus there is no a-historical access to ideas; an idea is essentially a historical entity. Its historicity is a function of its being. Adopting the language of a negative or mystical theology, and pushing language to its limits, Heidegger attempted to deconstruct onto-theological thinking. His later hostility toward the philosophical theology of the Middle Ages, following his early fascination with Scholastic speculative grammar, questions the very possibility of a philosophical dialogue with medieval theology. The Gadamerian retrieval of *verbum interius* renews the young Heidegger's project of a phenomenological and hermeneutic rehabilitation of medieval theology. Hermeneutics must never forget that Gadamer's remembering of language was effected through the retrieval of a theological insight. In understanding philosophy and theology within the universality of hermeneutics we emphasize the grammatical notion of the middle voice, which stresses the subordination of the subject to the verbal process. In the internal diathesis, the subject is inside the action of the verb. The primordial medial meaning of play for Gadamer shows the actual involvement in what is happening to us while we are playing. Play is a middle voice and the being of the game is circumscribed by the unfolding event of play. As a subject of understanding, the human being does not become passive but remains within the event of understanding. The middle voice situates the subject within a process.

On hermeneutic grounds, I have called into question Heidegger's separation of philosophy from theology. Hermeneutically, both exclusions, of theology from philosophy, for which Heidegger argues in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, and of philosophy from theology, which he demands in *Phenomenology and Theology*, are untenable. In fact, neither a simple methodological division between the disciplines, nor their total separation, is sustainable. However insistent philosophy and theology have been about maintaining the boundary between them, cross-fertilization is a fact of history. Janicaud's question directed at recent French phenomenology, "Has the boundary with theology not already been covertly transgressed, and if so should not this trespass be confessed and then theoretically re-legitimized?"¹⁴ can be put to the whole history of philosophy. In the age of interpretation, one would have to regard the metaphysical approach to the belonging together of philosophy and theology with a certain amount of

¹⁴See Dominique Janicaud, et al, *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate*, trans. Bernard G. Prusak (New York: Fordham University Press 2000).

non-commitment. What is essential is that the hermeneutic argument can support the metaphysical claim, on hermeneutic, rather than metaphysical grounds. Hermeneutics calls for a re-thinking, on multiple levels, of the problematic relationship between philosophy and theology. As the science of negotiating the spaces between discourses, hermeneutics requires that such disputes be perennially re-interpreted, for the terms change with each generation. Philosophy and theology both suffer from a stagnant formalism, grounded in methodology, which supposedly guarantees the objectivity and acceptability of academic research.

The space opened up between philosophy and theology, a space created by the incommensurability of the two, is an invitation to hermeneutics. What happens in the no-man's land between philosophy and theology is, and can only be, hermeneutics. In the work of Heidegger and Ricoeur, thinkers who in their distinctive ways thought the incommensurability of the two discourses, hermeneutics happens. My project has been to expose the hermeneutic advances and insights made by these thinkers as they endeavor to mediate this incommensurability. I have not decided on the proper relation between philosophy and theology, but, rather, endeavored to show that the privileged way to negotiate the space between them is by doing hermeneutics. The incommensurability of philosophy and theology requires that hermeneutics flourish, that a multiplicity of interpretations develop in the space between, because they must. Philosophy and theology cannot eliminate the interpretative space which exists by virtue of the distance between them. Neither can forbid the other to interpret their relationship otherwise.

The hermeneutic task is to describe and interpret what happens when that which needs to be understood is addressed by a thinker. This is the descriptive task, which aims at substantiating a particular possibility of interpretation without pretending to be the one and only, i.e., the final interpretation. Hermeneutics happens between thinkers when they thematize the relationship between philosophy and theology, even when their claims are in opposition. All such thinkers inevitably draw on theology: historically it has been the context in which Western thinking happens. The main task for the investigation of the relationship between philosophy and theology consists, not primarily in a presentation of the relations between the two disciplines as elaborated by individual thinkers throughout the history of the problem, but in an interpretative understanding of the relationship, and of its implications for the way philosophy and theology can truly belong together

while remaining radically different. I call this a hermeneutics of inclusiveness. I have taken as my guide Ricoeur's quest for a general philosophy of the creative imagination that addresses the pressing need to truly hear the voice of the *other* without losing the possibility of selfhood in radical plurality, while still refusing to enclose otherness in the circle of the *same*, or to identify otherness with self-reference.

The "belonging-together" of philosophy and theology refers to the historical belonging-together of the Western philosophical and theological traditions. Numerous examples support this factual belonging-together: the movement toward monotheism in Plato and Aristotle, completed by the Church Fathers under the inspiration of the Bible; the notion of „person“ in the Christological debates, which becomes the foundation of Western liberalism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; the hermeneutic circle, first discovered in the context of canon law and biblical interpretation; the *verbum interius* in Trinitarian theology and the philosophical „discovery“ of the primacy of language; the entire thrust of existentialism and the Hebraic conception of the human being as radically the chooser of his or her being. In all these cases—we see that movements that were regarded as philosophically autonomous were, in fact, impregnated with theological ideas. On the theological side, what would Christianity be without Greek metaphysics? Something completely different, perhaps unimaginably different. Luther failed to retrieve early Christianity without metaphysics because, hermeneutically speaking, this is not an option for us. Hermeneutic philosophy must engage theology, which grounds and permeates the Western tradition. This is not just an historical consideration: the subject-matter of hermeneutics, *die Sache selbst*, is theological. Hermeneutics is not theology, but it must be open to theology if it is to be receptive to the voices that constitute the tradition that we are.

The ancient Jews firmly believed that “without vision, the people perish.” The history of human thinking, and particularly the accomplishment of the Christian tradition as the continuation of the Jewish heritage, can be seen as an attempt to develop a hermeneutics of the „between,“ of the human and divine. Such a hermeneutics requires elaborating a vision of the Trinitarian God, and a human being who, in committing his- or herself to Christ, Incarnated and Crucified, follows human reason's innate quest for understanding, which, in fact, is self-understanding within the confines of our human condition, as affected by the original sin. Hermeneutics between philosophy and theology aims at a richness of voices that can address the

drama of human existence with the urgency it deserves.

In the hermeneutic age, philosophy has lost its pretension to speak from an absolute perspective (the fantasy of „pure reason“). Many of the arguments against incorporating theology into philosophy have been based on the assumption that philosophy can be freed from cultural situatedness, while theology is inextricably conditioned by history and culture. Now we recognize that Western philosophy is as much a cultural phenomenon as Western theology; it is a kind of creed of critical reasoning derived from Socrates, which is further refined during the Middle Ages, and springs forth fully-developed in the Enlightenment. That this creed aspires to autonomy does not change the fact that it emerges from a culturally and theologically conditioned situation. Indeed, philosophy in the West is as much a form of life as is theology. If philosophy and theology are both forms of life, then neither could have an *a priori* privilege over the other; theology, of course, loses its privilege, but so does philosophy. On the other hand, we can speak of both a philosophical and a theological perspective on the relationship between philosophy and theology. Two forms of life speak to each other, but theology has something that philosophy does not, the authority of God (for faith), and philosophy has something that theology does not, skeptical freedom from authority. We need to distinguish as much as possible between theological and philosophical perspectives, recognizing the legitimacy of the other view. Theology and philosophy must be free to develop in dialogical independence from one another, liberated from idealization and appropriation by the other. Only in firmly grasping their differences can we preserve the ground for a conversation between them. And, like every other hermeneutic conversation, this will be a recognition of mutual indebtedness that will undoubtedly have a transformative character.

As the art of understanding, hermeneutics demands that inquiries such as the one attempted here integrate the theoretical dimension of the issue with the factual. Theology is not merely an academic discipline; it is a way of being-in-the-world. With certain qualifications, the same can be said of philosophy. Two alternative ways of being human eye each other with the suspicion that the other represents a challenge and a threat to its own fundamental beliefs. Hermeneutics forecloses any easy solution to the problem, whether it be a liberal synthesis of the two discourses, or a post-liberal entrenchment of the opposition between them. Grateful for Gadamer's guidance we remember that "it would be a poor hermeneutician who thought

he could have, or had to have, the last word.”¹⁵ Rather, we all feel invited to an ongoing dialogue without determining the final conclusion.

¹⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method (Second, Revised Edition)*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1995), 579. In one of his last interviews, Gadamer elevated hope to *the* principle of the world: “Man cannot live without hope. This is the only sentence I would defend without any restriction.” “Prinzip Hoffnung: Hans-Georg Gadamer wird 102 Jahre alt,” *Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung*, February 11, 2002. Since hope both precedes and follows disappointment and disconfirmation, Gadamer’s invitation to openness and dialogue has a truly transformative character.